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## THE DIRECT METHOD IN THE FRENCH SECONDARY SCHOOL<sup>1</sup>

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In connection with the following article on the teaching of French in the University High School, it will be interesting to many teachers to know of the results given by the direct method as applied in the secondary schools of France and of the difficulties that are confronting the authorities in its application.

This is a short account of an article published in *La revue universitaire* (August 9, 1907) and called: "L'Enseignement des langues vivantes dans l'enseignement secondaire en 1905." As it is the report of an official, and as its conclusions were considered significant by the editors of *La revue universitaire*, the whole deserves consideration.

The reality of the progress made in the teaching of modern languages since the introduction of the direct method is unanimously recognized. Some of the tangible effects of the method are: that many students exchange letters with foreign correspondents, read papers, reviews, and books published in England and in Germany, visit those countries, and even complete their knowledge by a stay of several months in hospitable families. Thus the interest of the student has been aroused and the practical benefit of the method is certain. Moreover, the examination papers for the baccalaureate degree are of a higher grade than those of the past.

However, the results would be still better if the French schools did not have to suffer from certain evils. As these evils may also be found in the American schools where the direct method might be used, it will be of interest to the French teachers in this country to know about them.

<sup>1</sup> Read before the French Conference, held in connection with the Twentieth Educational Conference of the Academies and High Schools in Relations with the University of Chicago, November 8, 1907.

1. *Lack of homogeneity in the students of the same class*, arising from the fact that students thrown together for the first time in the second or third year where the direct method is used have not been started according to this method, or if so, by teachers who did not know how to use it with equal efficiency. These outsiders delay the progress of their more fortunate classmates.

2. *Fatigue of the teacher*.—The very use of the direct method, together with the lack of homogeneity among the students, increases the fatigue of the teacher. Every teacher who has tried the method as well as everybody that has attended the recitation, either as a student or as a visitor, is aware of this fact. There is fatigue for the teacher because a greater expense of energy purely physical is a conspicuous feature of the direct method, and also because the number of the students intrusted to one person is greater than it should be. The largest number of students allowed in a class by the French regulations is from twenty to twenty-five—a number which is certainly excessive—fifteen are enough—but this rule is violated in most *lycées* and colleges. Now too great a number of students overtaxes the teacher, discourages him, and then works against the method. In the district of Caen, for instance, this fatigue has been even found extreme.

3. *Shortcomings due to a wrong interpretation of the programmes and of the instructions given by the authorities*.—Several teachers and supervisors have not yet rightly interpreted the direct method.

a) *Teaching of the grammar*.—Many have still the impression that the direct method leaves aside the grammatical teaching or uses it as little as possible. Now the programme of 1902 urges the point that *so far from being neglected, grammar must be taught very systematically*. Some teachers have thought that since with the older method too much emphasis had been put on the grammatical side of the teaching, in using the direct method the practical teaching of the vocabulary should be the main thing and grammar should be learned somewhat unconsciously. The instructions issued by the authorities remind the

teachers that they must insist on a knowledge of the structure of the language and never neglect the written exercises which alone can give precision and permanency to the acquired portion of the language.

b) *Lack of literary culture in the higher classes.*—As the direct method aims at a more practical knowledge of the language, it follows that the students have less time to be acquainted with the literature, the history, and the geography of the country whose language they are learning. It seems that this is a general deficiency. However, it must not be imputed to the direct method, but rather to another false understanding of it on the part of the teachers. Too many of them have the idea that the students must be, above all, able to speak on matters familiar to a commercial traveler. There are other more profitable subjects of conversation in the classroom than eating and shopping.

As the conditions in our American schools and colleges are entirely different from those in the French schools, it will be of little use to mention the remedies proposed in France for these evils. It belongs to each country to find adequate means to suppress them.

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## THE TEACHING OF FRENCH IN THE UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL<sup>1</sup>

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The University High School is an experiment station where the teachers are permitted—rather I should say, encouraged—to seek in their practice the best possible way of giving their particular subject to the student. We in the French department think that we are working out what has already proved, and will increasingly prove to be a successful method.

We believe that the successful teaching of a modern language means giving the student a working knowledge from the

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